



## Background

[5] In 2002, Air New Zealand, including Air Nelson, introduced its *Express Class*. This included charges for excess checked baggage to be collected by check-in staff. The check-in software supporting this requirement changed in Nelson on or about 18 May 2007. After that date, check-in staff were unable to print a boarding pass for a passenger if that passenger's checked-in luggage exceeded the allowed weight unless further data was entered and a payment received or a permissible exception recorded. The software is called *X-Bag*. At some airports, the check-in software automatically registered the weight of bags placed on the check-in scales. However, at Nelson, the check-in operator had to manually enter the baggage weight into the check-in software as part of producing the boarding pass. It was therefore possible for check-in staff at Nelson to circumvent the restriction on printing a boarding pass by entering a weight that fell within the permitted tolerances.

[6] The weight and location of freight and checked baggage in the aircraft cargo holds is important information for pilots. The same is true of the number of passengers and their carry-on luggage. For the latter variable, there are accepted averages that are applied. There are established protocols for the distribution of freight and checked baggage in the cargo holds. The pilot is given a form setting out freight and checked baggage weights. The form also includes details of fuel rate, passenger loadings and last minute changes to enable the pilot to ensure the aircraft is within its safe operating limits and is appropriately configured for take-off, landing and flying generally.

[7] At Nelson Airport, the checked baggage weights are taken from the recorded weights entered into the check-in software by staff and from a weighbridge record of the trolleys of checked baggage readied for loading onto the plane. The two tallies should reconcile, subject to a tolerance margin. If they reconcile, that figure is used by the pilot in his/her decision-making. If they do not reconcile, the reason must be found to the satisfaction of the pilot.

[8] The final general point from the evidence that can be mentioned now is the *James Reason model of human error causation*. The airline industry deploys multiple defensive layers and systems to prevent accidents. Ideally each layer would be complete, but in reality it contains holes which are constantly changing. The holes in defensive layers arise either from active failures or latent conditions. Accidents can

occur when the holes in multiple layers line up, typically from a combination of these active failures and latent failures. The major safety goal of an airline is to prevent accidents, but the possibility can never be completely excluded. Incidents short of accidents provide an opportunity to improve the defensive layers. Accordingly, Air Nelson has a policy of *Just Culture* and *Open Reporting* to encourage incident reporting and to facilitate learning. All of this is part of the background understood by those at Air Nelson.

[9] Mr Benson's supervisor was Rachel Lawry, the Nelson Airport Manager. John Hambleton is Air Nelson's General Manager. He made the decision to dismiss Mr Benson. Gavin Carter is Air Nelson's Human Resources Manager. He was involved as an attendee at the disciplinary meeting and provided HR advice to Mr Hambleton.

[10] A number of colleagues gave evidence for Mr Benson. George Hollinsworth is EPMU's organiser based in Nelson. He was Mr Benson's principal representative during the disciplinary process.

[11] At the time of relevant events, there was an industrial dispute at Air Nelson about a new collective employment agreement. EPMU gave notice dated 17 April 2007 for strikes commencing on 2 May 2007. The notice was withdrawn on 1 May 2007 and those strikes did not proceed. EPMU gave a second strike notice dated 9 May 2007 for strikes for tarmac and traffic employees (and others) between 24 May and 8 July 2007. These strikes involved specified reductions in the normal performance by these employees of their duties. The strikes did proceed. It is common ground that Mr Benson's actions fell outside the notified strikes.

### **How the matter arose**

[12] Errol Hardie is a customer service agent employed by Air Nelson at Nelson Airport. He was the load controller on shift on 20 June 2007. He noticed a discrepancy between a passenger's checked-in baggage weight (23kgs) and the actual weight of the bags (30 kgs) and mentioned this to Ms Lawry. The passenger had been checked-in by Mr Benson. A recorded weight of 23kgs was the maximum that still allowed the software to print a boarding pass without engaging *X-Bag*.

[13] Having checked the weight discrepancy, Ms Lawry spoke briefly to Mr Benson. She asked him if he was always charging for excess baggage. He said *no*

*not always*, or something similar. Both Mr Benson and Ms Lawry say that their subsequent exchange occurred in Ms Lawry's office. She asked Mr Benson why he did not always charge. Mr Benson referred to what was going on with the industrial situation at the time. Ms Lawry asked if it (not charging) was Mr Benson's own form of protest and Mr Benson confirmed that it was. He said that a number of people were not doing things because of the current situation. When asked what, Mr Benson said *like things not being tidied away*. Mr Benson said that he was not putting the correct baggage weights against people checking in. Ms Lawry said that it was a serious breach with serious safety implications. Mr Benson said the he made sure the weight balanced out by recording the weight against other passengers. Ms Lawry told him not to do it again and Mr Benson agreed to comply. This exchange took only a few minutes.

### **The disciplinary process**

[14] Later on 20 June, Ms Lawry told Mr Benson that there would be an investigation. He said he was upset with being singled out, that he was a loyal employee and that it was only a few kilograms here and there. Mr Benson said he would involve the Union. By this time, Ms Lawry had spoken to both Mr Hambleton and Mr Carter. She also made a file note of what had been said to her by Mr Benson.

[15] On 21 June 2007, Mr Benson was given two letters. The first set out Air Nelson's concern that Mr Benson's actions over excess baggage charges and recording weights might amount to serious misconduct. Mr Benson was required to attend a meeting on 27 June 2007 to answer these concerns. The second letter required Mr Benson to attend a meeting later on 21 June 2007 to consider whether he should be suspended on pay pending the outcome of the disciplinary process.

[16] At the suspension meeting, Mr Benson was represented by a Union delegate (Mike Fouhy) and Mr Hollinsworth. Mr Hambleton, Mr Carter and Ms Lawry attended for Air Nelson. Mr Benson was given a copy of Ms Lawry's file note from the previous day and the meeting started a short time later. Mr Carter introduced the meeting explaining Mr Hambleton's presence and saying that the purpose of the meeting was to consider the issue of suspension. Ms Lawry then asked Mr Benson *what made you take the action you did?* Mr Benson said that sometimes it was compassionate, that it was not always industrial, that he was dealing with long queues and that it was only a couple of kilograms at a time. He said he had never

compromised passenger safety and that there was no safety risk involved. He said he had been doing this for a couple of weeks, on and off affecting about 10 flights. He said he took the weight off one passenger and added it to another. Mr Hollinsworth said that Mr Benson should not be suspended since there was no risk of the problem escalating or being repeated. After a break, Mr Carter announced the decision to suspend Mr Benson. Mr Benson was asked not to discuss the matter with other employees while the investigation was under way. Mr Benson said he was not the only one who was doing this practice. The meeting then ended.

[17] There was a meeting on 27 June 2007 to deal with the substance of the misconduct allegations set out in the 21 June 2007 letter. Present for Air Nelson were Mr Hambleton, Mr Carter and Ms Lawry. Mr Benson, Mr Fouhy and Mr Hollinsworth attended along with Grant Derecourt who is also a traffic supervisor. The meeting was recorded and I have reviewed the transcript and listened to the tape. There is no dispute that the tape is an accurate account of what happened.

[18] At the beginning of the meeting, Air Nelson circulated and briefly explained a paper that set out potential issues, especially relating to the Civil Aviation Act. Mr Benson read through prepared answers to the allegations set out in the 21 June 2007 letter. Mr Hollinsworth elaborated on a number of points as did Mr Derecourt. Mr Carter asked a number of questions which Mr Benson (principally) answered. There was some discussion about the topics. Mr Derecourt provided some further information and Mr Fouhy also gave several examples relating to undocumented weight on flights. Air Nelson said that Ms Lawry was gathering information and there was some discussion about interviews with other staff. The meeting ended with the expectation that a further meeting would be arranged.

[19] I should summarise Mr Benson's explanations. He said a number of times that his actions had occurred during the two weeks leading up to 20 June 2007. He thought he had adjusted weights a maximum of 10 times on single sector flights but never with any trans-shipping passengers. He said that on most occasions it was for compassionate reasons relating to a maximum of 6-7kgs. He explained that he wrote down the unrecorded weight and added it to another passenger so that the weights recorded in the check-in software balanced overall. Sometimes the other passenger had been checked in by another staff member so he adjusted their entry. He said that it went on with other staff but doubted anyone would admit that given what had

happened to him. He explained his initial response to Ms Lawry as being in the heat of the moment. He acknowledged that he had correctly used *X-Bag* to charge for excess baggage on occasions but also said that the training related to its introduction was not adequate. He said he had discretion as a supervisor to waive excess baggage charges. Mr Benson strongly refuted falsifying weights of baggage going onto aircraft and denied putting safety at risk.

[20] Ms Lawry was tasked with reviewing check-in weights to see what could be established about Mr Benson's actions. She checked records back to 28 May 2007. That showed four flights where Mr Benson had adjusted data already entered by himself or other check-in staff. The largest of these changes was 15kgs. The other changes were 6kgs (twice) and 8kgs. For the period under review, there were 33 flights for which Mr Benson entered checked-in passengers and recorded the maximum check-in weight. The records could not show on how many of these flights Mr Benson carried forward excess baggage rates from a passenger and wrongly recorded the baggage weight for a subsequently checked-in passenger.

[21] Ms Lawry and Mr Carter interviewed other staff to explore Mr Benson's claim that he was not the only one engaging in this practice. Most staff denied knowing of instances of under-recording the true weight of a passenger's baggage and over-recording another passenger's true baggage weight to avoid charging the first passenger excess baggage. The interviews indicated that not all staff were fully familiar with the *X-Bag* software. One staff member referred to the situation *once or twice* where everyone had transferred a kilo from one passenger to another for customer service type reasons.

[22] The interview notes and documentation relating to Ms Lawry's investigations were given to Mr Benson. A further disciplinary meeting was held on 13 July 2007 involving the same attendees, although another manager participated for part of this meeting. Again there is a transcript and a tape recording which I have checked and listened to. I will summarise Mr Benson's explanations given during this meeting.

[23] Mr Benson accepted that he had falsified baggage rates but did not accept that his actions had increased safety risks. Mr Benson was pressed about the situation of a passenger with incorrectly recorded baggage weights being offloaded. In that situation, the recorded weight would be used to adjust the aircraft load so the actual load would differ from that documented and relied on by the pilot. Mr Benson's

response was that only a few kilograms were involved so it was always safe. For Mr Benson, the point was made about unweighed bags (such as crew bags) being carried on planes. It was also argued that Mr Benson's actions were not intentional but were simply an error of judgement.

[24] Mr Benson was asked to give an explanation about the instances that were for industrial rather than compassionate reasons. He first said that he *can't and won't comment*, then said that he withdrew the comment about industrial reasons.

[25] There was discussion about Ms Lawry's investigation that showed four instances of Mr Benson retrospectively changing his or another check-in agent's recorded weights. Mr Benson was asked how adjustments were made on other occasions. He said he wrote down the extra weight and added it to subsequent passengers on the same flight. There was discussion about one trans-shipping passenger whose baggage weights may have been adjusted. Mr Benson reiterated that he did not adjust baggage weights for such passengers.

[26] It was pointed out that Mr Benson had used the *X-Bag* software correctly on several occasions and had used a manual receipting system several times during the relevant period. Mr Benson said he may have been assisted to use *X-Bag*.

[27] Mr Benson read a brief prepared statement from himself and another statement on behalf of his wife. Mr Benson again denied causing any safety issue and said his honesty and long service needed to be taken into consideration. He said his actions had compassion and no malice. There was discussion about support Mr Benson had received from other staff, including pilots. The meeting ended with the expectation of a further meeting.

[28] The next meeting was held on 23 July 2007 and involved the same attendees as previously. Again, there is a transcript and tape recording which I have read and listened to. I will summarise Mr Benson's explanations.

[29] There was reference to the extent to which the investigation had disclosed that others also did what was done by Mr Benson in changing recorded weights. By the time of this meeting, Air Nelson had completed the last of the interviews with other staff, that last interview indicated that *everyone has done this once or twice* for compassionate or customer service reasons.

[30] Air Nelson ran through how it saw the *Just Culture* algorithm applying. Mr Hollinsworth argued that Mr Benson had a good faith but mistaken belief that his violation of the rule was insignificant or justified.

[31] Air Nelson presented data to show that Mr Benson had a significantly higher proportion of bags at the maximum weight in the relevant period than during a previous period and had a higher proportion of such bags than did other employees. That information tended to suggest that Mr Benson had transferred weights on more occasions than had been admitted by him. For Mr Benson, it was argued that the data was affected by too many variables to allow for any safe conclusion.

[32] Mr Carter and Mr Hambleton had prepared a summary of the investigation to date. Mr Carter read through that and provided a copy for Mr Benson. Following a break, Mr Hollinsworth responded. In particular it was said that the documentation did not show more than five occasions of Mr Benson changing weights, nor did it discount Mr Benson's explanation of not making changes for trans-shipping passengers. Mr Hollinsworth said that Mr Benson's actions were not malicious and that he was mindful of aircraft safety. Reliance on Mr Benson's initial responses to Ms Lawry was criticised because of Ms Lawry's leading questioning and the lack of a proper disciplinary process at that stage. Mr Hollinsworth made the point that variances in explanation would always arise during a lengthy disciplinary investigation. That was a response to Air Nelson's criticism that Mr Benson's story had changed several times when challenged. Reference was made to an unrelated incident said to constitute a similar safety risk. Mr Hollinsworth stressed Mr Benson's long service, experience and good record and suggested a warning would be an appropriate outcome.

[33] Mr Carter responded to a number of these points and said that Air Nelson saw Mr Benson's conduct as amounting to serious misconduct. Mr Benson accepted that he had done something wrong and apologised. There was then a break. When the meeting resumed, Mr Hambleton said it was apparent from both the comments to Ms Lawry and the nature of the actions taken by Mr Benson that he intended to harm Air Nelson by not collecting revenue and affecting safety. He said that the method used by Mr Benson was designed to hide his actions and reinforced that he intended to harm Air Nelson. He noted that Mr Benson had admitted an industrial component to his actions on several occasions. Mr Hambleton referred to changes and inaccuracies

in Mr Benson's explanations and rejected the compassionate explanation as lacking credibility. Mr Hambleton concluded that he saw Mr Benson's conduct as indefensible for a long serving employee and a supervisor. He said that the trust and confidence was irreparably harmed and that Air Nelson had decided to summarily dismiss him. The meeting ended shortly afterwards.

[34] By letter dated 24 July 2007, the EPMU for Mr Benson asked for the reasons in writing for the dismissal. Mr Hambleton responded by letter dated 31 July 2007 giving these reasons. To summarise, the letter referred to Mr Benson's admission that he was not always charging for excess baggage. That led to Air Nelson losing revenue. Mr Benson achieved this by entering a false weight into the computer at check-in. Mr Benson admitted that this was deliberate and at first said this was industrially motivated. It was not covered by the strike notices and was contrary to EPMU's advice to members about the limited strike action covered by the notices. Mr Benson's actions were unlawful being in breach of the Civil Aviation Act requirement to keep accurate records. Mr Benson's actions potentially affected weight limits and balance of aircraft. The risk was increased because Mr Benson did not always make compensatory weight changes immediately. Because Mr Benson concealed these changes, Air Nelson could not know the extent of Mr Benson's conduct or the risk that had been created. This conduct discredited Air Nelson's reputation of conforming to Civil Aviation Act requirements. Mr Benson's recollection was sometimes vague and his responses changed during the investigation process meaning that he lacked frankness and credibility and his explanations were unconvincing. Mr Benson's claim of a lack of familiarity with the *X-Bag* system was not accepted. Mr Benson's industry experience and long service made it hard to believe that he had acted in the way established by the investigation. In summary, Air Nelson decided that Mr Benson's actions involved unlawful, deliberate and wilful acts by a supervisor that had implications for revenue collection and flight safety, and were done in a way that was designed to conceal what was happening. This amounted to serious misconduct.

### **Justification**

[35] Justification for the dismissal must be assessed on an objective basis, by considering whether Air Nelson's actions and how it acted were what a fair and reasonable employer would have done in all the circumstances at the time.

[36] Mr Benson's personal grievance is advanced on a relatively narrow basis. Complaint is made about Ms Lawry's initial interview and the use of Mr Benson's response. It is said that Air Nelson did not have an open mind when considering the explanation given by Mr Benson, especially in light of *Just Culture*. Because of the questions asked by Air Nelson, it necessarily gathered inaccurate information about the extent to which what Mr Benson did was also being done by other employees. It is argued that this was bad decision-making rather than wilful or malicious conduct on Mr Benson's part. Mr Benson struggled with the software changes and genuinely believed he was not creating any safety risk. Air Nelson was wrong to conclude that he was evasive or had lied during the investigation process.

[37] Regarding the company's obligations in a disciplinary situation, I am referred to *X v. ADHB* [2007] 1 ERNZ 66. In that case, the applicable disciplinary policy provided for prior notice of the nature and subject of allegations and the opportunity for representation where an employee was involved in a disciplinary investigation. The employer called the employee to a meeting, the purpose of which was to give him notice of such allegations. Beforehand, he asked and was told that it was probably unnecessary for him to be represented at the meeting and that the employer would not be legally represented. The employer had a prepared script for the meeting that would have seen it comply with its procedural requirements. At the meeting, the employer's lawyer was present but simply took notes. Surprised by the employer's allegations, the employee became angry and voluble and responded at length to their substance. Things said by the employee at this meeting were later used by the employer as part of its decision-making to dismiss him.

[38] The Court found that the employer breached its self-imposed obligation to make reasonable attempts to ensure that an employee facing allegations of serious misconduct was properly represented at all stages of the investigation. The Court also found that, if represented, the employee probably would not have said anything in response to the allegations at the initial meeting. As a result, the Court held that the employer was not entitled to rely on things said because of its breach of fair procedure.

[39] In the present case, counsel says that Air Nelson, similarly, should not be permitted to rely on Mr Benson's initial response to Ms Lawry.

[40] Air Nelson's personnel manual says that *during the disciplinary process, and throughout any investigation being conducted as part of that process ... employees must be ... given an opportunity to have personal representation*. The manual goes on to set out procedural guidelines for dealing with misconduct. Where the company has received notice of alleged misconduct an appropriate preliminary investigation should be arranged. If that establishes grounds for concern, the employee must be interviewed and must be given notice of the grounds of concern and advised of their right to representation. These requirements are at least as strong as those in *X v. ADHB*.

[41] The issue here is when did Air Nelson's obligation to advise Mr Benson about representation arise? *X v. ADHB* differs from the present case. There, the decision had been made to commence the disciplinary process but the employee was told that it was probably not necessary to have legal representation at the first meeting following that decision. Here, when Ms Lawry first spoke to Mr Benson, no decision had been made about any disciplinary process. Ms Lawry knew that the weight of a passenger's bags had not been correctly entered into the computer. She was perfectly entitled to ask Mr Benson about that before engaging any disciplinary process. The ensuing exchange was very brief and it would be artificial to say that Ms Lawry should have stopped it before Mr Benson referred to the industrial situation. I accept that Ms Lawry simply sought clarification by putting to Mr Benson for his comment what she had taken his response to mean. Mr Benson confirmed her understanding and made some further comment about the circumstances of his actions. Ms Lawry referred to safety implications and told him not to do this again. All of this fell well within the bounds of a *preliminary fact finding exercise* such as that referred to in *NZ Electrical IUOW v. Auckland Electrical Power Board* [1991] 1 ERNZ 385.

[42] Mr Benson, in his evidence, also criticised Ms Lawry's manner as intimidating and forcing him to say something that was not true in the heat of the moment. However, I prefer Ms Lawry's evidence that Mr Benson was not intimidated, that if anything he was a little defiant and indignant and that her manner and questions were appropriate.

[43] It follows from these findings that Air Nelson was entitled to refer to what had been said by Mr Benson during this first conversation as part of its decision to

dismiss. Although Mr Benson said during the disciplinary process that he withdrew the industrial comment, that did not mean that it was not said nor that it was not true.

[44] There is a complaint about whether fair consideration was given to Mr Benson's explanations in light of *Just Culture* and *Open Reporting*. Counsel referred me to the transcripts and submitted that, no matter what was raised by Mr Benson, Air Nelson was at pains to challenge and rebut his explanation. As mentioned, I have listened to the tapes. I find that Air Nelson gave fair consideration to Mr Benson's explanations. The tapes show that Air Nelson managers listened to, clarified and tested Mr Benson's explanations before reaching any conclusions. It is correct that Air Nelson did reject much of Mr Benson's explanations but there were good reasons for doing so. For example, during the 27 June meeting, Mr Benson said that *at most it would have been 6-7kgs and it probably would have been one on any particular flight ....* However, Air Nelson established that there was a change of 15kgs on a flight on 16 June 2007. Similarly, Air Nelson never accepted Mr Benson's assertion that he had not falsified rates. It was clear from the very start that Mr Benson had entered false weights into the computer so he could print out boarding passes. Overall, I conclude that Air Nelson did give Mr Benson's explanations unbiased consideration, free from predetermination and uninfluenced by irrelevant considerations.

[45] More should be said about *Just Culture*. The policy is expressed in Air Nelson's management policy manual. It accepts that a culture of blame creates a barrier to open and honest reporting. That prevents learning from mistakes. The key role of *Just Culture* is to provide a fair, open and more blame-free reporting culture. The manual sets out the *Just Culture* algorithm applicable where there is a duty to follow a procedure or rule. During the investigation meetings, Mr Benson and Air Nelson identified the key difference between them as whether he had a good faith but mistaken belief that the violation of the rule was insignificant or justified. If the answer to that question was *yes*, Mr Benson should have been coached; if *no*, punitive action could ensue.

[46] Mr Benson clearly intended to deprive Air Nelson of excess baggage revenue, whether as part of his own industrial protest or otherwise. That significantly and unjustifiably increased the risk that a safety incident related to weight and its distribution in an aircraft could occur. Mr Benson's conduct was reckless in respect

of that risk because it involved a gross deviation from the standard of care expected of a reasonable employee. The reasonable employee would have complied with CAA and Air Nelson rules and recorded weights accurately.

[47] From all this, Air Nelson concluded that the answer to the question was *no*, a conclusion any employer acting fairly would have come to. The *Just Culture* algorithm makes it explicit that punitive action may result in such circumstances.

[48] There is a complaint about the questions asked of other employees and a submission that the questions elicited inaccurate information. To recap, those interviews did not support Mr Benson's assertion that everyone else (nearly) was doing the same with adjusting rates. One employee only said:

*... can I use an example. Everyone has done this once or twice. Get an old nanna given a box of lemons and has 24kgs. Put it down as 23 and add a kilo to the next person. Figures come out in the wash. Wouldn't call it falsification of baggage weights.*

[49] That employee gave evidence to like effect. Other employees, when interviewed, denied knowledge of the falsification of baggage weights.

[50] EPMU for Mr Benson made some of its own inquiries during the investigation process but eventually had to acknowledge that it could not produce evidence of a widespread practice in the absence of employees' consent to the use of their name supporting that claim.

[51] The evidence before the Authority does not support the existence of the systematic type of transferring of reasonably large amounts of excess weight between passengers, at least partly because of the industrial situation, which is what Mr Benson did. I am left to conclude that Air Nelson's questions did not elicit inaccurate information.

[52] One of Air Nelson's conclusions about Mr Benson's explanations was that it lacked frankness and credibility. It is submitted that Air Nelson was wrong in its conclusion and that it was only natural that Mr Benson's memory of events would unfold and be jogged as the investigation proceeded.

[53] Mr Benson sought to minimise the extent of his blameworthy behaviour by owning up to a shorter period of time, lower weights and less frequency than were actually involved. Air Nelson's investigation established that Mr Benson's actions

involved a longer period of time and greater weights and that they probably involved a higher frequency.

[54] The other crucial factor was that Mr Benson played down the significance of the industrial protest, played up the alleged compassionate reasons and argued that his conduct stemmed from a lack of training. That was all rejected by Air Nelson and any reasonable employer would have done the same in the circumstances.

[55] It follows from the foregoing that I see no merit in the points raised by Mr Benson suggesting that Air Nelson's actions and how it acted fell below the standard of a fair and reasonable employer. To the contrary, the reasonable employer's response is encapsulated in the final paragraph of the dismissal letter:

*At the end of the investigation we concluded that your actions amounted to serious misconduct and dismissal was the direct outcome in all the circumstances. We firmly believe that this would also have been the decision of an objective and fair and reasonable employer in all the circumstances. Your actions involved unlawful, deliberate and wilful acts by a supervisor that had implications both for revenue collection and flight safety. They were done in a way designed to conceal and only stopped when your actions were coincidentally discovered. Our company is one in which over a million people a year trust us to be professional, accurate and safe. Your actions irreparably harmed the trust and confidence we are entitled to expect of you in the employment relationship.*

## **Summary**

[56] Mr Benson was justifiably dismissed. He does not have a sustainable personal grievance.

[57] Costs are reserved.

Philip Cheyne  
Member of the Employment Relations Authority